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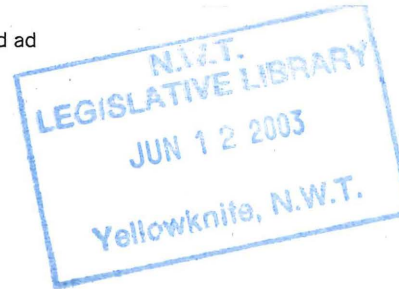


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Birthing now a headache

Couple concerned as specialist dispute continues

Yose Cormier
Northern News Services



Yellowknife (June 06/03) - The threatened strike by physician specialists is turning one Yellowknife couple's blessed event into a time of anxiety.

NNSL Photo

Melanie and Michael Dunsmore expect their second child June 29, just three days before 12 of 15 specialists say they will quit if they do not have a new contract with the territorial government.

Among the 12 are the pediatrician and the obstetrician who would have guided the birth of the Dunsmore's child. Because of the uncertainty, the couple will induce labour, and they blame the government for forcing the issue.

"It's crazy. It's very frustrating. We would like to see the delivery played our way but we'd have to play the what-if game," Michael said Wednesday.

The contract dispute between doctors and the government dominated the first day of the legislative session. Range Lake MLA Sandy Lee criticized the government's handling of the talks. She used the Dunsmores' case as an example of the hardship created by the failure to reach an agreement.

Michael Dunsmore puts an ear to his wife's stomach and listens to his unborn child. - Yose Cormier/NNSL photo

The Dunsmores discussed the possibility of inducing labour for about three weeks and took their concerns to Lee when contract talks broke off Tuesday.

Doctors rejected the government's proposal to settle outstanding issues through binding arbitration and said they will not resume negotiations until June 28.

The government's offer would give the specialists an average of \$400,000 a year. The government says doctors are seeking \$500,000 in the final year of a two-year contract that expires next April.

The prospect of inducing labour doesn't appeal to Melanie Dunsmore, but she says it's better than going to Edmonton to give birth.

"This is an unnecessary procedure. I'm healthy, the baby is healthy, but because of the possibility of not having specialist support, our doctor wants to induce labour, starting this week," she said.

"I don't want to leave here. I have family, I have friends here.

"It's a very personal experience. That's why we are choosing to induce labour. I don't want to go to Edmonton," she said.

If the couple travelled to Edmonton for the delivery, they would have to leave two weeks in advance and stay however long is needed after the birth.

The government would cover Melanie's expenses but not Michael's.

"We'd have to pay for the flight, accommodations and food for myself and our daughter," he said.

The Dunsmares are aware of another 12 couples facing a similar situation.

Another concern that pushed the couple toward inducing labour is Health Minister Michael Miltenberger's contingency plan.

The plan includes a locum for the obstetrics department, but the Dunsmares aren't confident with the choice, a 76-year-old doctor.

"Our concern is that it's an aging surgeon whose specialty is not obstetrics-gynecology.

"The concern for the unborn baby is that there is no pediatrician," Melanie said.

"I don't want to risk my unborn baby's health."

The couple said the first pregnancy was normal but with about 15 minutes left, an obstetrician and a pediatrician were called in.

"We want to hope for a resolution between the two parties but we have to plan for the worst," Michael said.



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